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ABSTRACT

A survey determined people's perceptions of the relationship of vocational-technical education (VTE) to secondary school programs. Data were collected from 451 local school board members, school administrators, school business officials, and citizens from Illinois during a joint convention of the state associations of all three groups in November 1991. A written survey asked respondents to declare the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with 11 statements about secondary VTE. Respondents indicated overwhelming agreement that VTE should be an integral part of the secondary school curriculum. They also agreed on three out of five purposes of high school VTE, namely, that it should provide: (1) cooperative work experience and apprenticeships; (2) technical knowledge and skills to enter a career; and (3) career awareness, guidance, and exploration. A high percentage (85 percent) either strongly agreed or agreed that public school should be held accountable for work force preparation outcomes through current legislation. Respondents agreed on the following: the state board should hold secondary vocational programs accountable through measurement of student performance; high school programs should meet performance standards; the state should require a program remediation plan, closer state monitoring and technical assistance, and published school and program accountability ratings; Illinois high school students should be able to pass a work readiness test; and tech prep should replace traditional VTE. A majority (55 percent) agreed that the state should establish a dual system of in-school and inplant training. Releasing students from school to the workplace for part of their education time drew mixed reviews. Nine recommendations are offered based on three results. (YLB)

ED357193

VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND THE SECONDARY SCHOOL: What School Board Members Say

SCHOOL BOARD SURVEY RESULTS
NOVEMBER 1991

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VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND THE SECONDARY SCHOOL: What School Board Members Say

SCHOOL BOARD SURVEY RESULTS

ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BOARDS'
ANNUAL CONVENTION

Chicago, Illinois
November 22-23, 1991

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SURVEY RESPONDENTS

The Illinois Council on Vocational Education has been conducting a survey of school board members and administrators at their annual convention for four years. The surveys have dealt with issues concerning vocational education and the secondary schools.

Numerical data for the 1991 survey were obtained from 451 respondents. This was a significant increase from the prior three years which obtained data as follows:

- 1988 Survey: approximately 100 respondents
- 1989 Survey: 262 respondents
- 1990 Survey: 283 respondents
- 1991 Survey: 451 respondents

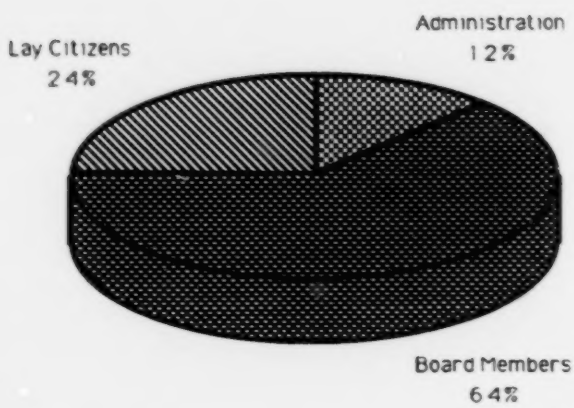
Of the 451 respondents, 64% were school board members, 24% were lay citizens such as visitors, spouses, and "others" attending the conference, and 12% were administrators of elementary, secondary, or unit school districts. This is consistent with the respondents in the 1989 Survey which were 63%, 23%, and 14% respectively.

Of the board members,

- 63% were from unit districts,
- 27% were from elementary districts, and
- 10% represented secondary districts.

Overall, the respondents had opinions about the statements with very few indicating no opinion or not responding at all.

Survey Respondents



EXECUTIVE ABSTRACT

For the fourth consecutive year, the Illinois Council on Vocational Education (ICoVE) surveyed local school board members, school administrators, school business officials, and lay citizens from throughout Illinois who were attending the joint annual convention of the Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB), the Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA), and the Illinois Association of School Business Officials (IASBO) held in Chicago, Illinois on November 22 and 23, 1991.

The purpose of the survey was to determine people's perceptions of the relationship of vocational-technical education to secondary school programs. Data were collected through written surveys, small group discussions, and individual interviews in the convention's exhibit area.

Data were captured from 451 respondents using a written survey which asked respondents to declare the extent to which each strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, strongly disagreed, or had no opinion regarding eleven statements about vocational-technical education in secondary schools Based on the responses, ICoVE makes the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: School boards and administrators must make vocational education an integral part of the academic secondary education curriculum. To help accomplish this, they should capitalize on the emerging efforts by teachers of mathematics, English, science, vocational education and other programs to integrate curriculums.

Recommendation 2: ISBE must assist local educational agencies in expanding the scope of vocational education to contribute to all purposes of secondary education. DAVTE must exert leadership to remove the FOR JOB ENTRY ONLY stigma from vocational education and to implement policies and incentives which encourage all teachers in all high school courses to address the multiple purposes of students.

Recommendation 3: ISBE must take a strong leadership role in establishing legislation which presses secondary schools to expand instruction to addressing learning outcomes regarding workforce preparation. Concurrently, ISBE must institute policies and procedures which help schools address academic and workforce preparation outcomes from both academic and vocational courses.

Recommendation 4: ISBE must continue to monitor the legislation being considered and implemented by other states to extract those educational concepts and precepts which would make Illinois' secondary education more effective and efficient.

Recommendation 5: DAVTE must increase efforts to help high school vocational education teachers increase and expand student performance outcomes from their courses and programs.

Recommendation 6: ISBE must intensify and expand options available to LEAs for testing of student performance. DAVTE must increase inservice staff development of teachers, counselors, and administrators in LEAs to implement various avenues for assessing student outcomes and to meet performance standards.

Recommendation 7: In order to help LEAs meet accountability standards, ISBE and DAVTE must provide additional monitoring and technical assistance, increased consultive assistance, expanded inservice for staff development, establishment of model programs, or other means.

Recommendation 8: ISBE and DAVTE should continue to monitor the concept of a required, standardized work readiness test. Such a test may pull LEA curriculum efforts at cross purposes. Clarification of the nature and content of such a test may relieve local school officials of their concerns.

Recommendation 9: ISBE, DAVTE and school boards must continue to work together regarding the implementing of Tech Prep. ISBE must continue to seek and secure additional funding for implementing Tech Prep.

GENERALIZED RESULTS

	Response
Statement 1: Vocational education should be an integral part of the secondary school curriculum.	94% of all respondents agreed.
Statement 2: The main purpose(s) of high school vocational-technical education should be to provide: • Preparation for university • Cooperative work experience and apprenticeships • Technical knowledge and skills to enter a career • Basic academic skills • Career awareness, guidance and exploration	Most purposes ranked high with the three groups of respondents agreeing with one another.
Statement 3: The State Board's current accountability legislation, which now addresses only academic outcomes, should also address workforce preparation outcomes.	85% of all respondents agreed.
Statement 4: Illinois should pass legislation similar to the Oregon Education Act for the 21st Century.	70% had no opinion or did not respond indicating they did not know about the Act
Statement 5: To ensure accountability, the State Board should make high school vocational programs meet rigorous student performance standards in: • academic skills • occupational skills • high school completion • employment outcomes (jobs and earnings) • equity and access for special populations • post-program job performance	Over 76% of all respondents agreed.
Statement 6: To ensure that high school vocational programs have met the performance standards, the State Board should require: • program-entry skill standards • standardized written tests • industry skill standards • standardized "hands-on" tests • portfolios of work samples • certification of skill mastery	Most agreed, favoring "hands-on" tests over written tests.
Statement 7: The following should be consequences of not meeting accountability standards: • reduction in state and federal funds • no salary increases • closer state monitoring and technical assistance • required program remediation plan • published school and program accountability ratings	Nearly all favored the consequences except for no salary increases.
Statement 8: Illinois should require all secondary students to pass a standardized test on work readiness (e.g., work attitudes, business knowledge, teamwork, application of basic skills).	Most school board members and citizens agreed while administrators were mixed.
Statement 9: Tech Prep should replace traditional vocational education programs.	Administrators agreed while others lacked opinion.
Statement 10: Illinois should implement vocational programs like those in Germany and Denmark in which vocational education is delivered to 65% of high school students through a dual system of in-school and industry-based learning.	Most agreed.
Statement 11: High school students should be able to spend 50% or more of their required educational time at the workplace, assuming that the district's average daily attendance is not adversely affected.	No consensus with nearly equal numbers agreeing as disagreeing.

SURVEY RESULTS

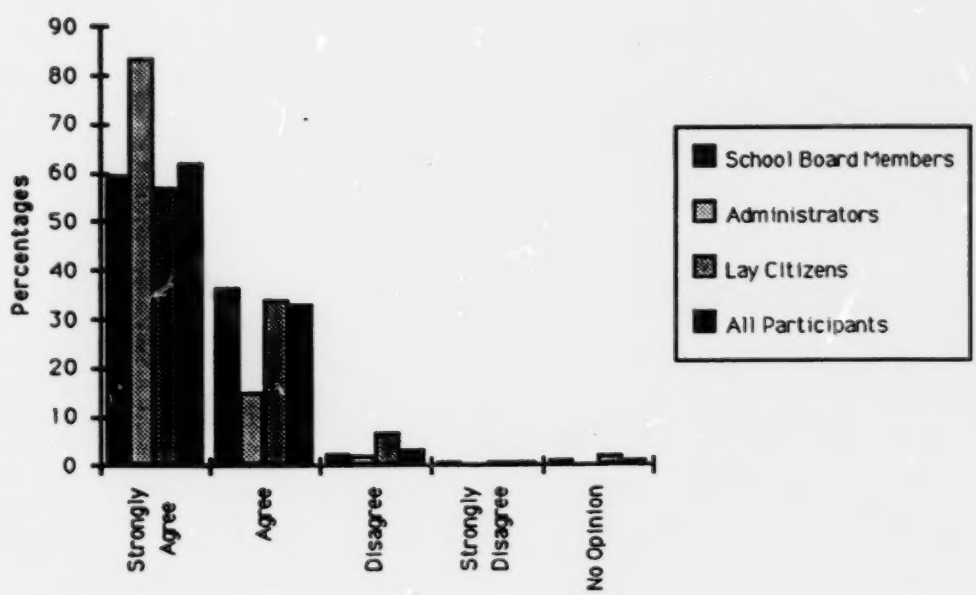
STATEMENT 1: Vocational education should be an integral part of the secondary school curriculum.

In response to Statement 1, those surveyed indicated overwhelming agreement (94%) that vocational education should be an integral part of the secondary school curriculum. This is consistent with the results from the 1989 Survey which showed that 98.3% were in favor of this relationship.

Although school board members, school administrators, and the public are strongly in favor of vocational education at the high school level, reality shows a constant decline in the scope and depth of vocational education courses offered to students at the secondary level. Attempts have been made to "regionalize" vocational education offerings by establishing area vocational centers and, most recently, education for employment regions. These have attempted to draw students from a number of attendance centers for those programs which were of relatively higher cost. But as the number of secondary students and the tax dollars available have declined, many schools have elected to "keep their kids at home to learn the basics."

Alternative delivery systems and methods need to be developed to provide high school students with access to quality instructional programs which have the goal of job entry.

Should Vocational Education be an Integral Part of the Secondary School Curriculum?



STATEMENT 2: The main purpose(s) of high school vocational-technical education should be to provide:

- **Preparation for university**
- **Cooperative work experience and apprenticeships**
- **Technical knowledge and skills to enter a career**
- **Basic academic skills**
- **Career awareness, guidance and exploration**

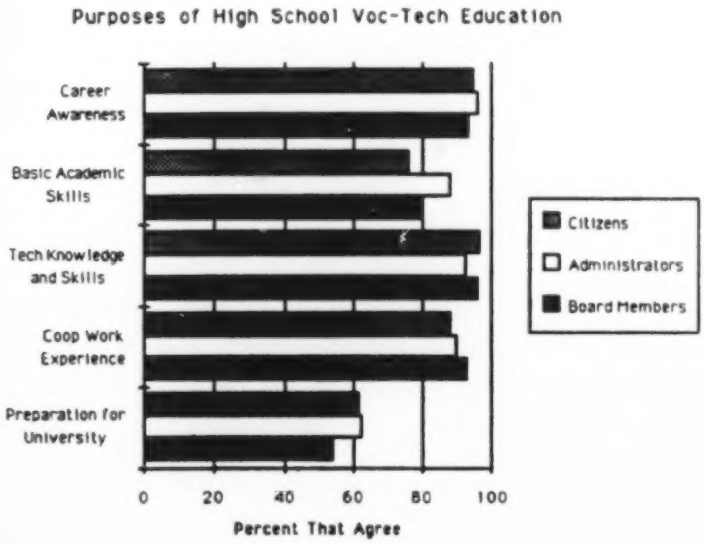
In response to Statement 2, board members, administrators, and lay citizens tended to agree with each other on the purposes of high school vocational-technical education.

The three purposes of cooperative work experience and apprenticeships; technical knowledge and skills to enter a career; and career awareness, guidance and exploration were of nearly equally high importance.

The respondents also tended to agree that high school vocational-technical education has a purpose in preparing students to attend a college or university.

The purposes of schooling have been debated for centuries. So also, the purposes of vocational education have been debated for decades. For example, should vocational education attempt to meet the needs of (a) the individual worker by providing him or her with economic security, (b) the employer by providing a trained workforce, or (c) the society by ensuring the economic stability of the nation? The answer depends on who you ask, but in the final analysis, most will agree it must meet all three. Because of our diverse and ever-changing workplace and workforce, vocational education must contribute to all of the purposes stated and more.

Just as any other instructional program on the secondary level, vocational education must also contribute to the overall purposes of schooling. If vocational education is set apart, it will be left apart.



STATEMENT 3: The State Board's current accountability legislation, which now addresses only academic outcomes, should also address workforce preparation outcomes.

In response to Statement 3, a high percentage (85%) of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that public schools should be held accountable for workforce preparation outcomes through current legislation.

This response adds credence to the response to Statement 1 that vocational-technical education should be an integral part of public secondary education in Illinois.

By their responses, the respondents are saying that workforce preparation is a significant purpose of public secondary education. By its omission, the current accountability legislation is saying that academic outcomes are the only significant purpose of schooling.

The implications of this finding are that two changes need to occur: the first is to change accountability legislation to include workforce preparation outcomes; the second is to change vocational education so that it, too, addresses academic outcomes.

STATEMENT 4: Illinois should pass legislation similar to the Oregon Education Act for the 21st Century.

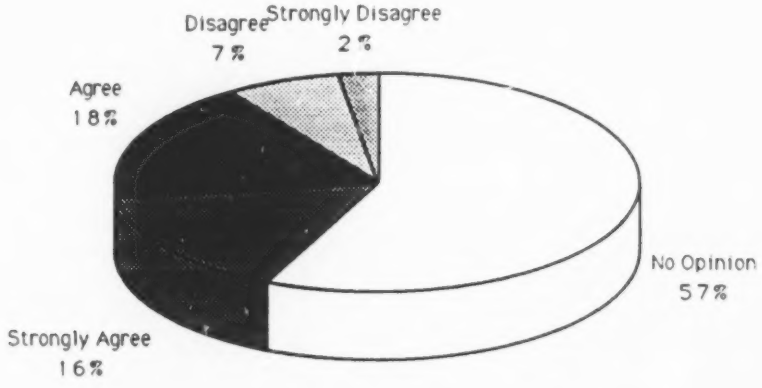
In response to Statement 4, most respondents (70%) either had no opinion or did not respond at all. Based on data from individual interviews, it became clear that many respondents were not informed regarding the Oregon Education Act.

However, a third of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that Illinois should have similar legislation. Board members (35%) tended to be slightly more in favor with the statement than Administrators (31%).

The 1991 Oregon Education Act calls for a significant restructuring of elementary and secondary education. Primary pupils in Grades K-3 would be grouped according to ability rather than grade level. This would help pupils learn according to their developmental ability, rather than the group norm.

At the high school level, students completing the 10th grade would be required to obtain a "certificate of mastery" before moving on to the 11th and 12th grades. Having passed their "certificate," students would choose between a college preparatory program or a combination of academic courses and on-the-job vocational instruction. The certificate-of-mastery plan would help to assure prospective employers and college admissions officials that students have certifiable skills.

Participants' Views on the Oregon Education Act



STATEMENT 5: To ensure accountability, the State Board should make high school vocational programs meet rigorous student performance standards in:

- **academic skills**
- **occupational skills**
- **high school completion**
- **employment outcomes (jobs and earnings)**
- **equity and access for special populations**
- **post-program job performance**

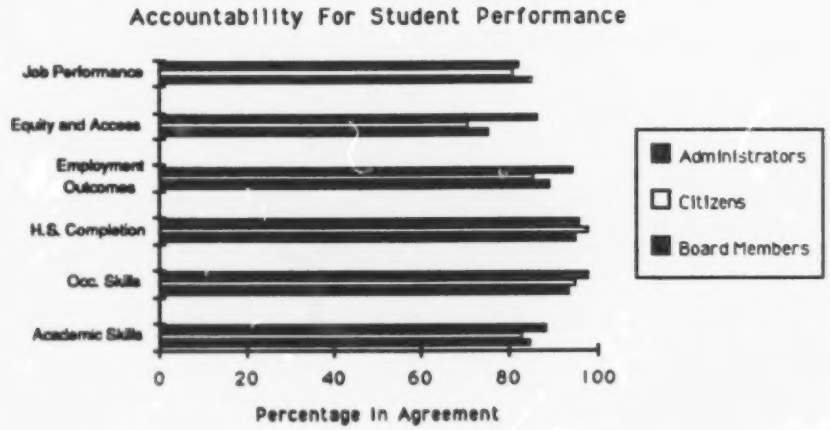
Respondents largely agreed (minimum of 76%) with Statement 5 that the State Board should hold secondary vocational programs accountable through measurement of student performance and that performance should be assessed in all areas of student performance. (See graph)

The overwhelmingly favorable response seems to be a cry for accountability in general, regardless of the specific areas of student performance. The response to Statement 5 tends to validate the response to Statement 3 by calling for more accountability in public education and that the accountability be directed from the state level.

Administrators tended to be more favorable to state-required accountability based on student performance (91%) than did board members (87%).

The issue here is not whether schools should or should not be held accountable; the issue is by what measure or measures schools should be held accountable. What is the measurement? Is it graduation rate due to non-disruptive seat time, dropout rate, percentage of graduates who enter college, percentage of graduates who complete college, letter grades, learning outcomes, percentage of graduates who go directly into the workforce, or others? What is the most appropriate measurement, given the educational expectations?

The problem is that the academic side of the school has been favoring one set of accountability criteria, e.g., college entrance, while vocational education has been using another, e.g., job performance outcomes. The trend may be that both academic and vocational instruction are moving to a mid-ground of academic performance outcomes.



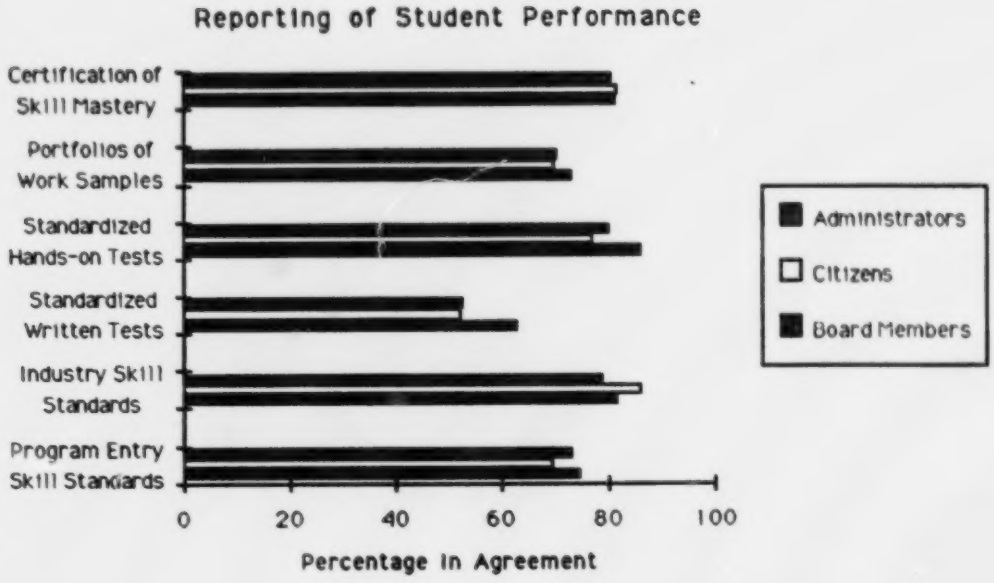
STATEMENT 6: To ensure that high school vocational programs have met the performance standards, the State Board should require:

- **program-entry skill standards**
- **standardized written tests**
- **industry skill standards**
- **standardized "hands-on" tests**
- **portfolios of work samples**
- **certification of skill mastery**

Overall in response to Statement 6, the respondents agreed that high school programs should meet performance standards and that the State Board should require accountability through various forms of measurement of student outcomes. (See graph)

More specifically, the respondents tended to favor standardized "hands-on" tests and certification of skill mastery over standardized written tests.

The experts in educational testing and measurement have long contended that everyone cannot be measured in the same way. An implication of this finding for vocational educators is to seek out and employ additional and various means of assessing student outcome performance. The issue here may be to decide which means of measurement is the best for assessing a particular student, rather than which *one* means is the best for measuring all vocational education students.



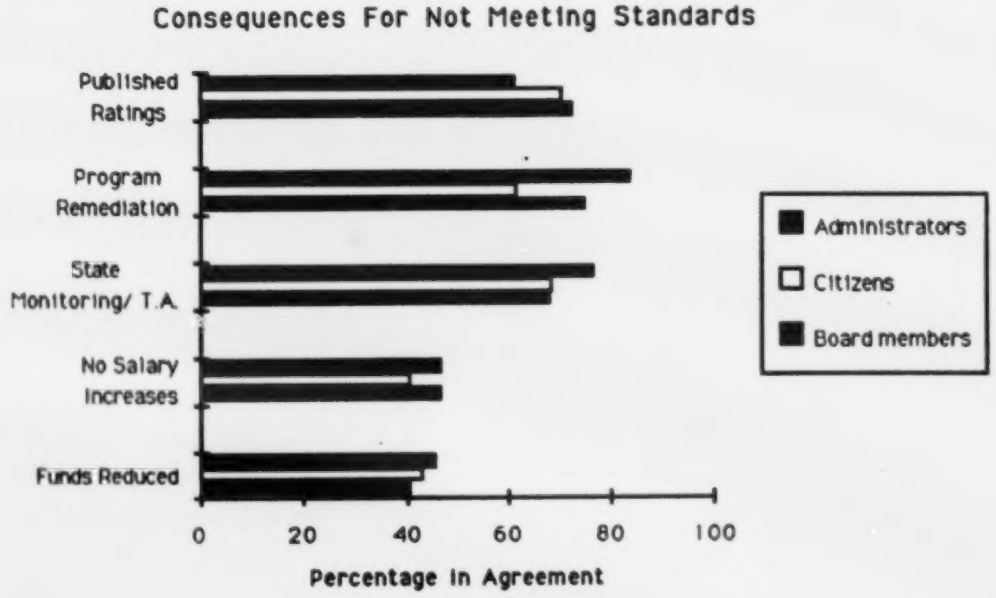
STATEMENT 7: The following should be consequences of *not meeting accountability standards:*

- **reduction in state and federal funds**
- **no salary increases**
- **closer state monitoring and technical assistance**
- **required program remediation plan**
- **published school and program accountability ratings**

Reactions were strong to Statement 7 with very few respondents indicating no opinion. The reactions of lay citizen respondents tended to mirror those of school board members.

Most respondents favored a required program remediation plan, closer state monitoring and technical assistance, and published school and program accountability ratings, rather than reduction in state and federal funds. Respondents were nearly equally divided on the consequence of no salary increase. (See graph)

The essence of the responses was "Help us do better, but don't cut our funding." The implication being that with funding, we can do better, but without funding, we can do nothing for we would have nothing to work with. In these cases, cutting funding serves more as a punishment, rather than as a means of fostering improvement.

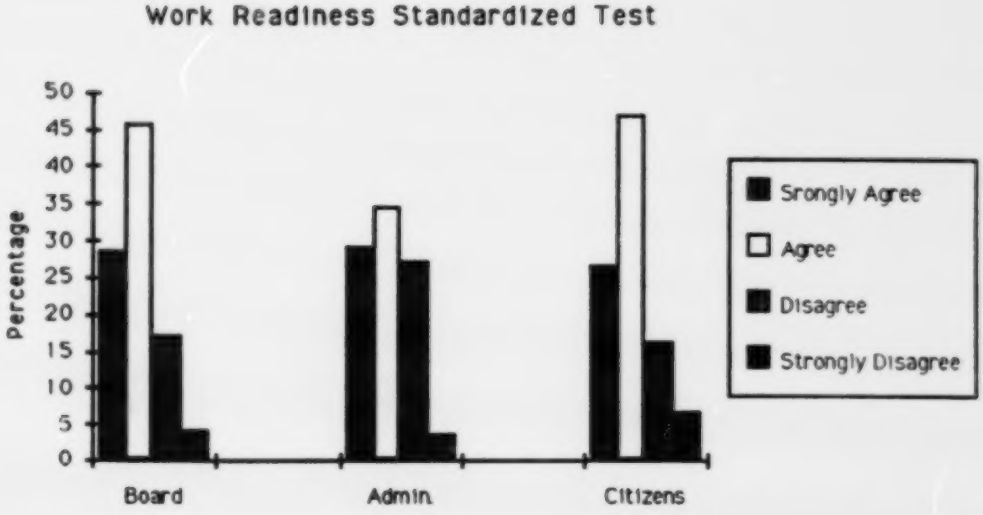


STATEMENT 8: Illinois should require all secondary students to pass a standardized test on work readiness (e.g., work attitudes, business knowledge, teamwork, application of basic skills).

Most school board members and citizens agreed with Statement 8 that Illinois high school students should be able to pass a work readiness test.

Administrators tended to strongly agree (29%) or agree (35%), but 27% disagreed. Individual interviews revealed that some administrators were concerned that such a test could cause students to enter the job market directly after graduation, rather than to pursue further education and training.

The perception appears to be that if students are ready for work, they're not ready for college, and conversely, if they're ready for college, they're not ready for work. The responses further reveal that, for many educators, the purpose of high school is for college entrance. Furthermore, the belief is that schools cannot do both--prepare students for college and work--only for college. Given the decline in funding and numbers of students in many schools, this belief may be true that schools indeed can't do both. The question remains, if schools currently can't do both, how can they be restructured so they can?



STATEMENT 9: Tech Prep should replace traditional vocational education programs.

Administrators strongly agreed with Statement 9 that Tech Prep should replace traditional vocational education. Citizens tended to not have an opinion, and some board members were not as sure. Based on individual interviews, this lack of opinion was based on lack of information about Tech Prep due to newness of the concept at the time of the survey.

For the administrators, Tech Prep may provide a convenient resolution to several conflicting purposes for schooling. The Tech Prep initiative contains several concepts which tend to resolve extant conflicts. These include:

1. Attention to the middle 50% of high school students, i.e., those between the 25th percentile and 75th percentile in class rank. Students in the top 25% tend to be self directed and largely college bound. Students in the lower 25% tend to have special abilities which are met through special programs. But the students in the middle 50% may or may not be either college-bound or job-bound. Tech Prep addresses their goals and needs.

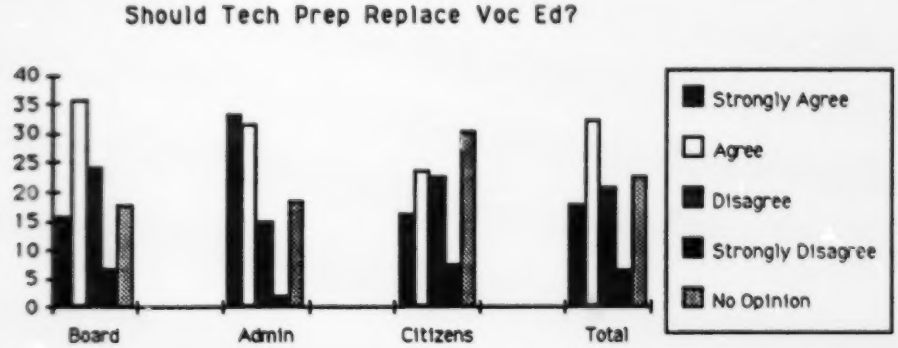
2. A sequence of instruction culminating with an associate's degree from a community college. This concept resolves the problem of whether high school should be for college entrance or not because with Tech Prep, everyone is going to college.

3. Horizontal integration of academic and vocational curricula. This concept provides occupational applications of academic theories, as well as contributing academic prowess to vocational instruction.

4. Vertical articulation of high school and community college curricula. This concept ensures course sequencing which eliminates course repetition, identifies gaps in subject matter, and provides students with a smooth matriculation from the secondary to the postsecondary level.

5. Application of course content of both academic and vocational courses. Showing students how course content is applied in a person's occupational and personal life improves student motivation toward learning, lengthens retention, and improves performance on outcome measures of instruction.

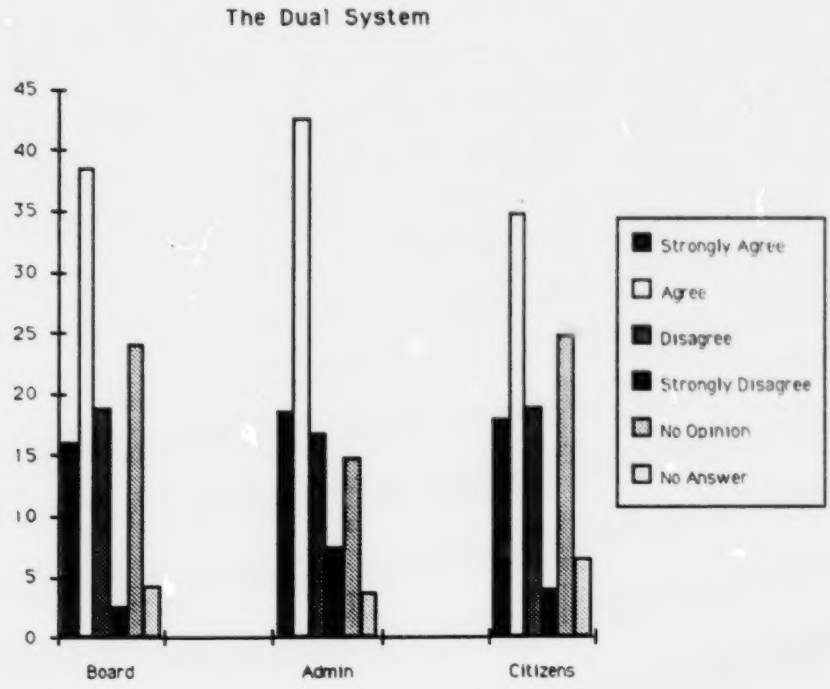
6. Attention to higher order technical skills such as problem solving, team working, technical systems, continued learning, technical communications, computer processing and others. Such technical skills are transferable from job to job, occupation to occupation, and even career to career throughout a person's lifetime.



STATEMENT 10: Illinois should implement vocational programs like those in Germany and Denmark in which vocational education is delivered to 65% of high school students through a dual system of in-school and industry-based learning.

Most respondents (55%) agreed with Statement 10 that the state should establish a dual system of in-school and in-plant training for high school students, but 23% had no opinion, indicating that those respondents may be withholding judgment pending additional information.

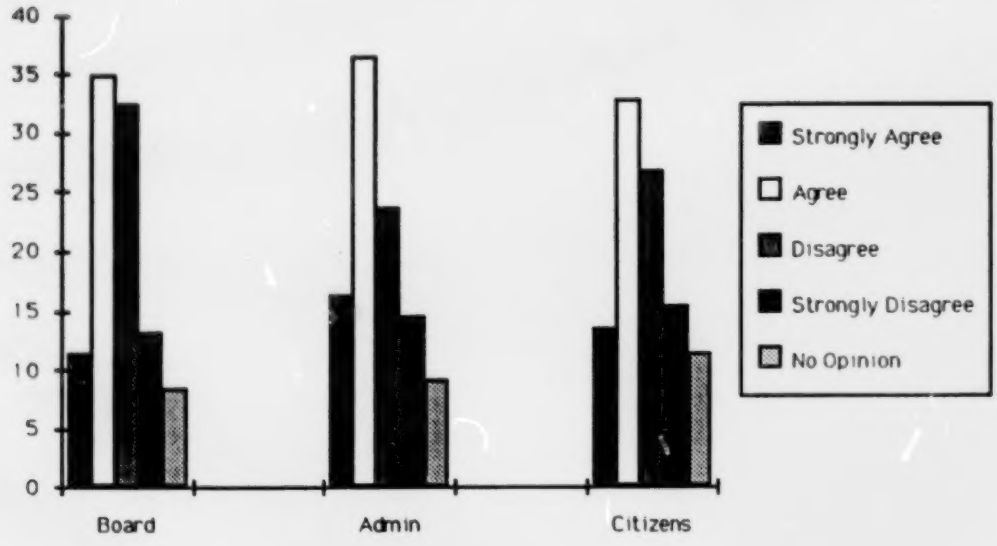
Dr. Henry David once remarked that "Whatever you say about education is true, somewhere." He might have added that "what works well in one place, may work even better or not at all elsewhere." Efforts must, therefore, be focused on identifying those instructional systems or aspects of systems which can be replicated effectively and efficiently within another culture. A culture's mores and shared values will drive or resist attempts at systemic reform. Replication of alternative systems must be approached cautiously.



STATEMENT 11: High school students should be able to spend 50% or more of their required educational time at the workplace, assuming that the district's average daily attendance is not adversely affected and that mastery of academic skills is ensured.

Releasing students from the school place to the workplace for part of their education time drew mixed reviews from respondents. Overall, 47% tended to agree, while 44% tended to disagree.

Students in the Workplace



Top: ICoVE members Mary Beth Stine and Hartzel Black distribute publications to IASB conventioneers. Bottom: Dr. Richard Hofstrand assists convention attendees with ICoVE survey.

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